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Statement of the Vanier Institute of the Family to the Special Joint Committee.....

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The Vanier Institute of the Family
151 Slater Street
Ottawa, Ontario
K1P 5H3

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STATEMENT OF
THE VANIER INSTITUTE OF THE FAMILY
TO THE
SPECIAL JOINT COMMITTEE
ON IMMIGRATION POLICY
IN RESPONSE TO
THE FEDERAL GREEN PAPER ON
IMMIGRATION AND POPULATION

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STATEMENT OF
THE VANIER INSTITUTE OF THE FAMILY
ON
IMMIGRATION AND POPULATION

The Vanier Institute of the Family places in question a number of the assumptions basic to the discussion in the Green Paper on Immigration and Population. The document is predicated upon the present labour market patterns, the trend toward increasing urbanization, and the urban nuclear family unit as fundamental aspects of Canadian society. None of these phenomena can any longer be assumed. All of them have contributed to a society which is non-familial; that is, a society which does not allow for the flourishing of a variety of meaningful human relationships. Single parent families, Prairie Indian tribal families, rural extended families, and other familial patterns characteristic of the Inuit communities in the North, Maritime fishing towns and wilderness settlements do exist, are increasingly being recognized, and need to be encouraged. It is time to remove the barriers to the full development of these and other lifestyles.

We must resist the temptation to equate work with employment in the labour market. The Vanier Institute in "Some Policy Approaches of The Vanier Institute of the Family" has stated:

> "The prevailing definitions of "work" and "labour force" are rooted in a very narrow interpretation of reality. An alternative, and a more nearly comprehensive approach is to recognize that home-keeping, caring for children and parenting are among the most socially valuable and useful forms of work."

By coming to revalue many of the activities people undertake without a monetary motive, but which enrich our social relationships and our environment, we will come to revalue ourselves more fully as persons. The Local Initiatives, Opportunities for Youth and Local Employment Assistance Programs are steps in this direction. The growing discussion of paying a wage to housewives, although too narrow in scope, reflects this changing perception of work.

The Green Paper does not recognize the emergence of the changing human meanings of work in our society. In fact, despite occasional gestures, humanist and cultural values are totally subordinated to economic and manpower considerations. The Green Paper continues to view people (both Canadian and non-Canadian) as resources for exploitation in a manner which glosses over the human implications of the consequences.

For example:

> "How much demand, for exactly what sort of workers and where – this information is the key to using 'immigration' as an effective instrument to serve the immediate demands of the Canadian economy."[1]

What this really says, in human terms, is that we are using immigrants, *immigrant persons*, to serve the demand of the Canadian economy. What is the Canadian economy but a certain pattern of production, distribution and consumption? The Green Paper is working within a conceptual perspective which subordinates people to systems. We need to move further away from a mechanistic society, not closer to it. But of course this reversal of perceptions and values is not just an immigration related problem. For too long we have been subordinating Canadian citizens themselves to the "demands of the Canadian economy". This concept of persons as resources, as a source of revenue for our economic system, is at heart anti-human. When this view of man is applied to immigration it becomes a policy of exploitation. Those we see, in our own economic terms, as the best resource for our system are imported in just the same manner as any material resource.

The second basic assumption in the Green Paper, namely that intensive urbanization is inevitable, also needs to be seriously questioned. We can no longer afford to simply succumb to "the apparently irresistable attraction of major cities." The alienating effects of our large metropolitan areas are well documented and have been experienced to some degree by all of us personally. Suburban isolation, the fumes and noise of traffic, the rush to meet transportation schedules, the sterility of our buildings, the mechanization of our jobs and, thereby, ourselves; all seem to tear us from the natural rhythms of life.

Constantinos Doxiadis, who invented the term "human settlements" for our living places, has said that "man and automobile do not fit together in the same space; man is small, slow and soft and the automobile, large, fast and hard."[2] It seems that in our urban human settlements we are becoming more like the automobile; that we are losing an inner sense of grace and flow. And as Doxiadis so clearly outlines, "The urban decisions to be taken in the next two generations will commit civilization further than the sum total of everything humanity has ever done." The Green Paper glimpses the urban congestion of other nations, winces and seeks to close the gates on the world. It is true that our own St. Lawrence corridor is fast becoming, in Doxiadis terminology, a megalopolis, or one long series of connected metropolitan areas.

The time has come to create the necessary human dimension. Though the outer limits of our super-cities will likely be extra-human in dimension, the inner limits of our living spaces can be made more intimately human. Our experience on earth has taught us that a human scale is one which takes into account the human capacity to enjoy walking, seeing, hearing and smelling. Countries such as Great Britain, Sweden and Pakistan are applying these lessons to their new human settlements.[3] We can begin to re-orient our settlement patterns, large and small (including the St. Lawrence corridor as well as our rural areas and the North), to the human perspective by valuing the familial relationships of man in community, of man in communion with man.

We must also look beyond the narrow populated strip clinging to our southern border and give serious consideration to developing the vast mid-Canada area, stretching north to the tundra line;[4] perhaps utilizing intermediate technology concepts of E.F. Schumacher which are designed "as if people matter."[5] As the Green Paper recognizes, the zero population growth argument that we should halt population growth by keeping births in balance with deaths is not the issue. The issue is rather that our present demographic and cultural patterns must change. Our transportation and communications technologies, the circulatory and nervous systems of our country, will have to be re-oriented so as to spread the pulse of community to now isolated areas.

As Harry Boyle, then Vice-Chairman of the Canadian Radio-Television Commission illustrated so movingly in a recent speech, our Inuit people in the far North are now telling us that soapbox operas sent via Anik satellite are not helping their communities to develop in the manner that they wish.[6] We have much to learn from our own native population on the value of tribal, aboriginal and communal life patterns. They are teaching us to use the technical extensions of man that have begun to use us.

Beyond our own borders there are potential immigrants in Latin and Central America who are already forming links with our native Indian people through a Pan American Indian alliance. Furthermore, more immigrants should be encouraged from other parts of the world which have formed ties with Canada such as the Caribbean and French-speaking Africa.

Canada is at a point in its history where it needs to break out of its reactionary stance, born of a fear of an uncertain future and which is manifested so clearly in the Green Paper. We need to take up the task of inventing the Canadian future with a sense of hope and adventure. We have an obligation to the rest of the globe, particularly to the Third World, to take the needs of all mankind into full account. If we cannot absorb the large increases in population from all countries, we can help to alleviate the severe stress on some smaller countries, for example as we are now doing with some in the Caribbean. Where we are not able to help through immigration, we can help by contributing to the developing of a new international economic order which truly puts people first.

Canada, as a middle nation in the world with a good supply of natural resources, needs to develop its potential as a "bridging nation". This process of development, painful as it is likely to be, can be justified on practical as well as moral grounds. If Canada does not seek living alliances and a blending with other races and cultures, the "whites" of Canada are likely to end up in a reverse exploitation situation in the decades ahead. As our human population begins to touch the limits of our planet's resources, the most moral behaviour becomes also the most practical.

There is concern in the Green Paper that many of the immigrants entering Canada in the nominated category have economic reasons as their chief motive for emigrating. On the one hand, we as Canadians gear our own social patterns primarily to economic demands, and on the other hand we are disappointed that nominated relatives feel a strong interest in their economic well-being. Does this mean they are any less suitable for immigration? Would we prefer nominated immigrants who have little concern for their own economic well being? The Green Paper unintentionally traps then in a no-win situation.

A most disturbing trend in our present immigration approaches is the move toward a severe narrowing of the concept of family and a limiting of people admitted on familial grounds as opposed to manpower suitability. Family values also suffer when human values are subordinated to economic demands. Though there is evidently some ambivalence in the Green Paper on the proper nature and place of familial relationships in immigration policy, the discussion clearly suggests a narrowing of the concept of family to "close" or "immediate" family members when an expanded concept is necessary.

The Vanier Institute of the Family has stated publicly many times the necessity for expanding our concept of family beyond the urban nuclear family of two parents with 1.9 children. To view this particular family form as the only "normal" form and all others as "deviant" is to misperceive the rich reality of contemporary familial lifestyles.[7] Our society until recently has been unaware of the true complexity of family life and has perpetuated an ideal, simplistic and utopian view of family living which consequently underlies our public policies and institutional developments. The urban nuclear family pattern has been a useful unit of production and consumption of goods and services within our economic system but has proven increasingly prone to breakdown as a context for human nurturing and support. The Vanier Institute has come to realize as a result of its recent research that the essential loving, parenting and *supporting* can be found in a variety of familial lifestyles. We need to look to our immigrant population as much for their communal and familial values and rich cultural contribution to the Canadian nation as for their hard labour.

Unfortunately, the limited framework of the Green Paper has not encouraged discussion of such matters to take place. Despite numerous acknowledgements that it should not, the Green Paper has appeared in isolation from a total public policy framework. There is now a deep need to look at immigration policy in the context of a total reworking of our Canadian "definition of reality". We must develop and promote more comprehensive concepts of housing, education, learning, the family, work, income, employment, land-use, transport, resource development, communications and our global obligations. These concepts cannot be explored within the limited and restrictive framework presented in the Green Paper but rather need to develop out of a much more open and greatly expanded mind-set.

It is also unfortunate that as a consequence of these far reaching issues being dealt with in a paper on immigration there is an implication that many of our national problems are directly due to the influence of immigrants themselves. We must strongly resist any attempt to make immigrant groups scapegoats for the failings of our inherently contradictory economic and social systems.

The Green Paper on Immigration has presented us with four options. All four of them are narrow and restrictive – none of them do we see as viable or in any way adequate. It is imperative that a fresh series of options be formulated some elements of which have been presented in this paper.

It is easy to say the timing of the Green Paper is bad – but perhaps there is no good time for such a document. Now that it is with us, the Vanier Institute of the Family most strongly recommends that the government broaden the discussion to include the many issues concurrent with, and integrally related to the subject of immigration and population.

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1 Volume 1, "Immigration Policy Perspectives", page 22.

2 "Ecumenopolis: Tomorrow's City", Encyclopedia Britannica Book of the Year, 1968. See also, Dyson, Poetschke and Duncan, "Housing and Human Settlement for Transcendant Man in a Transcending Society – a Policy Overview" for Central Mortgage and Housing Corporation, 1971.

3 Ibid

4 See in this connection the concept developed by Richard Rohmer, former Chairman of the Mid-Canada Development Conference.

5 *Small is Beautiful: A Study of Economies As If People Mattered,* Harper – Row, 1974.

6 "Listening to Our Society", speech given to the Fifth Annual Conference of North American Broadcast Section, World Association For Christian Communication, December, 1974.

7 Some of these contemporary familial lifestyles have been noted in the opening paragraph of this statement.

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